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U.S. Department of Housing
and Urban Development
Office of Housing

A Good Place to Live!

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Introduction

Having a good place to live is important. Through your Public Housing Agency (or PHA), the Section 8 Certificate Program and the Housing Voucher Program help you to rent a good place. You are free to choose any house or apartment you like, as long as it meets certain requirements for housing quality. Under the Section 8 Certificate Program, the housing cannot cost more than the Fair Market Rent. However, under the Housing Voucher Program, a family may choose to rent a more expensive house or apartment and pay the extra amount. Your PHA will give you other information about both programs and the way your part of the rent is determined. This booklet is to help you understand what the Housing Quality Standards are and why they are important to you.

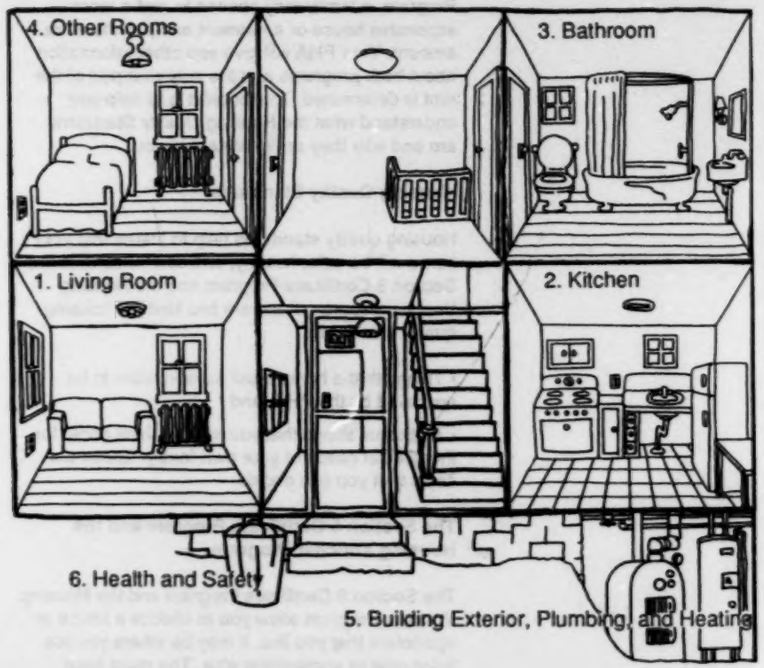
Housing Quality Standards

Housing quality standards help to insure that your home will be safe, healthy, and comfortable. In the Section 8 Certificate Program and the Housing Voucher Program there are two kinds of housing quality standards.

- Things that a home *must have* in order to be approved by the PHA, and
- Additional things that you *should* think about for the special needs of your own family. These are items that you can decide.

The Section 8 Certificate Program and the Housing Voucher Program

The Section 8 Certificate Program and the Housing Voucher Program allow you to *choose* a house or apartment that you like. It may be where you are living now or somewhere else. The *must have* standards are very basic items that every house or apartment must have. But a home that has all the *must have* standards may still not have everything *you* need or would like. With the help of Section 8 Certificate Program or Housing Voucher Program, you *should* be able to afford a good home, so you should think about what you would like your home to have. You may want a big kitchen or a lot of



windows or a first floor apartment. Worn wallpaper or paint may bother you. Think of these things as you are looking for a home. Please take the time to read *A Good Place to Live.* If you would like to stay in your present home, use this booklet to see if your home meets the housing quality standards. If you want to move, use it each time you go to look for a new house or apartment, and good luck in finding your good place to live.

A Good Place to Live is divided into six sections and a summary. In each section there is a picture and an explanation of the items that the unit *must have*. There are also suggestions of some things you *should* think about. At the end of each section, think about whether or not the unit has everything it *must have* and everything you think it *should* have. There is room throughout the booklet and at the end for you to make notes.

1. Living Room
2. Kitchen
3. Bathroom
4. Other Rooms
5. Building Exterior, Plumbing, and Heating
6. Health and Safety (in the home, yard, and neighborhood)

Read each section carefully. After you find a good place to live, you can start the *Request for Lease Approval* process. You may find a place you like that has some problems with it. Check with your PHA about what to do, since it may be possible to correct the problems.

The Requirements

Every house or apartment must have at least a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. A one-room efficiency apartment with a kitchen area is all right. However, there must be a separate bathroom for the private use of your family.

Generally there must be one living/sleeping room for every two family members.

1. Living Room

The Living Room Must Have:

Ceiling
A ceiling that is in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

Walls
Walls that are in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging or leaning, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

Electricity
At least two electric *outlets*, or one outlet and one permanent overhead *light* fixture.

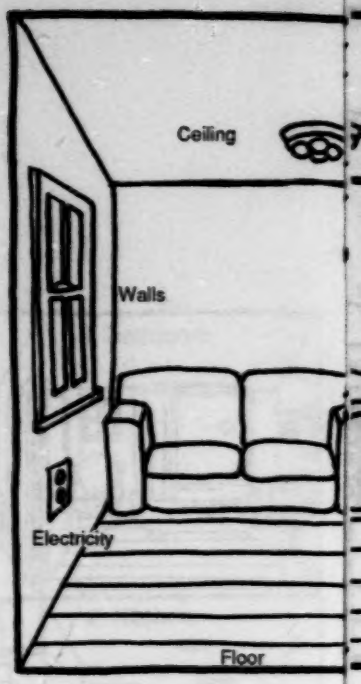
• Count this as one outlet.

• Do not count table or floor lamps, ceiling lamps plugged into a socket, and extension cords; they are not *permanent.*

• *Not* acceptable are broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other firm support (such as a chain), missing cover plates on switches or outlets, badly cracked outlets.

Floor
A floor that is in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes, missing or warped floor boards or covering that could cause someone to trip.



Notes:

Window

At least one window. Every window must be in good condition.

- ***Not*** **acceptable are windows with badly cracked, broken or missing panes, and windows that do not shut or, when shut, do not keep out the weather.**

Lock

A lock that works on all windows and doors that can be reached from the outside, a common public hallway, a fire escape, porch or other outside place that can be reached from the ground. A window that cannot be opened is acceptable.

Paint

- **No peeling or chipping paint if you have children under the age of seven and the house or apartment was built before 1978.**

You Should Also Think About:

- **The types of locks on windows and doors.**
  - **— Are they safe and secure?**
  - **— Have windows that you might like to open been nailed shut?**
- **The condition of the windows.**
  - **— Are there small cracks in the panes?**
- **The amount of weatherization around doors and windows.**
  - **— Are there storm windows?**
  - **— Is there weatherstripping? If you pay your own utilities, this may be important.**
- **The location of electric outlets and light fixtures.**
- **The condition of the paint and wallpaper.**
  - **— Are they worn, faded, or dirty?**
- **The condition of the floor.**
  - **— Is it scratched and worn?**

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2. Kitchen

The Kitchen Must Have:

Ceiling

A ceiling that is in good condition.

- ***Not*** **acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging, large amounts of loose or failing surface material such as plaster.**

Storage

Some space to store food.

Electricity

At least one electric *outlet* and one permanent *light* fixture.

- **Count this as one outlet.**
- **Do not count table or floor lamps, ceiling lamps plugged into a socket, and extension cords; they are not *permanent.***
- ***Not*** **acceptable are broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other firm support (such as a chain), missing cover plates on switches or outlets, badly cracked outlets.**

Stove and Oven

A stove (or range) and oven that works. (This can be supplied by the tenant.)

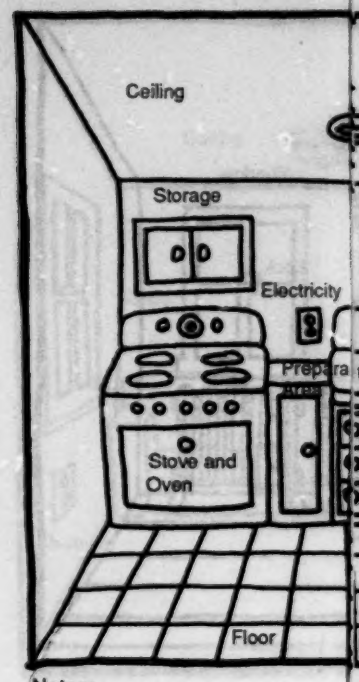
Floor

A floor that is in good condition.

- ***Not*** **acceptable are large cracks or holes, missing or warped floor boards or covering that could cause someone to trip.**

Preparation Area

Some space to prepare food.



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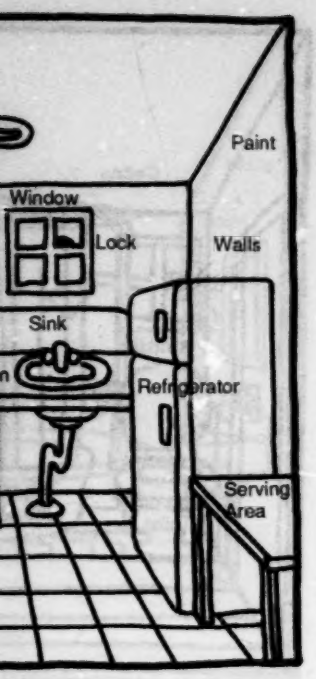

Paint

• No peeling or chipping paint if you have children under the age of seven and the house or apartment was built before 1978.

Window

If there is a window, it must be in good condition.

Lock

A lock that works on all windows and doors that can be reached from the outside, a common public hallway, a fire escape, porch or other outside place that can be reached from the ground. A window that cannot be opened is acceptable.

Walls

Walls that are in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging or leaning, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

Serving Area

Some space to serve food.

— A separate dining room or dining area in the living room is all right.

Refrigerator

A refrigerator that keeps temperatures low enough so that food does not spoil. (This can be supplied by the tenant.)

Sink

A sink with hot and cold running water.

— A bathroom sink will not satisfy this requirement.

You Should Also Think About:

• The size of the kitchen.

• The amount, location, and condition of space to store, prepare, and serve food. Is it adequate for the size of your family?

• The size, condition, and location of the refrigerator. Is it adequate for the size of your family?

• The size, condition, and location of the sink.

• Other appliances you would like provided.

• Extra outlets.

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3. Bathroom

The Bathroom Must Have:

Ceiling
A ceiling that is in good condition.

- ***Not*** **acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.**

Window
A window that opens or a working exhaust fan.

Lock
A lock that works on all windows and doors that can be reached from the outside, a common public hallway, a fire escape, porch or other outside place that can be reached from the ground.

Toilet
A flush toilet that works.

Tub or Shower
A tub or shower with hot and cold running water.

Floor
A floor that is in good condition.

- ***Not*** **acceptable are large cracks or holes, missing or warped floor boards or covering that could cause someone to trip.**

Notes:

Paint
• No chipping or peeling paint if you have children under the age of seven and the house or apartment was built before 1978.

Walls
Walls that are in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging or leaning, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

Electricity
At least one permanent overhead or wall light fixture.

• *Not* acceptable are broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other firm support (such as a chain), missing cover plates on switches or outlets, badly cracked outlets.

Sink
A sink with hot and cold running water.
— A kitchen sink will not satisfy this requirement.

You Should Also Think About:

• The size of the bathroom and the amount of privacy.

• The appearance of the toilet, sink, and shower or tub.

• The appearance of the grout and seal along the floor and where the tub meets the wall.

• The appearance of the floor and walls.

• The size of the hot water heater.

• A cabinet with a mirror.

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4. Other Rooms

Other rooms that are lived in include: bedrooms, dens, halls, and finished basements or enclosed, heated porches. The requirements for other rooms that are lived in are similar to the requirements for the living room as explained below.

Other Rooms Used for Living Must Have:

Ceiling
A ceiling that is in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

Walls
Walls that are in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging or leaning, large amounts of loose or falling surface material such as plaster.

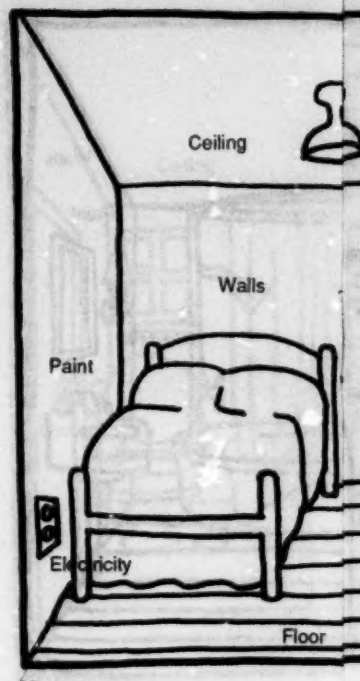
Paint
• No chipping or peeling paint if you have children under the age of seven and the house or apartment was built before 1978.

Electricity in Bedrooms
Same requirement as for living room.

In All Other Rooms Used for Living:
There is no specific standard for electricity; but there must be either natural illumination (a window) or an electric light fixture or outlet.

Floor
A floor that is in good condition.

• *Not* acceptable are large cracks or holes, missing or warped floor boards or covering that could cause someone to trip.



Notes:

Lock

A lock that works on all windows and doors that can be reached from the outside, a common public hallway, a fire escape, porch or other outside place that can be reached from the ground.

Window

At least one window, which must be openable if it was designed to be opened, in every room used for sleeping. Every window must be in good condition.

- *Not* acceptable are windows with badly cracked, broken or missing panes, and windows that do not shut or, when shut, do not keep out the weather.

Other rooms that are not lived in may be: a utility room for washer and dryer, basement, or porch. These must be checked for security and electrical hazards and other possible dangers (such as walls or ceilings in danger of falling), since these items are important for the safety of your entire apartment. You should also look for other possible dangers such as large holes in the walls, floors, or ceilings, and unsafe stairways. Make sure to look for these things in *all* other rooms not lived in.

You Should Also Think About:

- What you would like to do with the other rooms.
  — Can you use them the way you want to?
- The types of locks on windows and doors.
  — Are they safe and secure?
  — Have windows that you might like to open been nailed shut?
- The condition of the windows.
  — Are there small cracks in the panes?
- The amount of weatherization around doors and windows.
  — Are there storm windows?
  — Is there weatherstripping? If you pay your own utilities, this may be important.
- The location of electric outlets and light fixtures.
- The condition of the paint and wallpaper.
  — Are they worn, faded, or dirty?
- The condition of the floors.
  — Are they scratched and worn?

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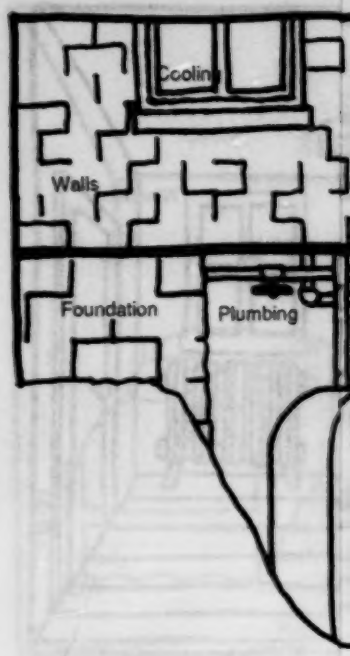
5. Building Exterior, Plumbing, and Heating



The Building Must Have:

Roof
A roof in good condition that does not leak, with gutters and downspouts, if present, in good condition and securely attached to the building.

- Evidence of leaks can usually be seen from stains on the ceiling *inside* the building.

Outside Handrails
Secure handrails on any extended length of stairs (e.g., generally four or more steps) and any porches, balconies, or decks which are 30 inches or more above the ground.

Walls
Exterior walls that are in good condition, with no large holes or cracks that would let a great amount of air get inside.

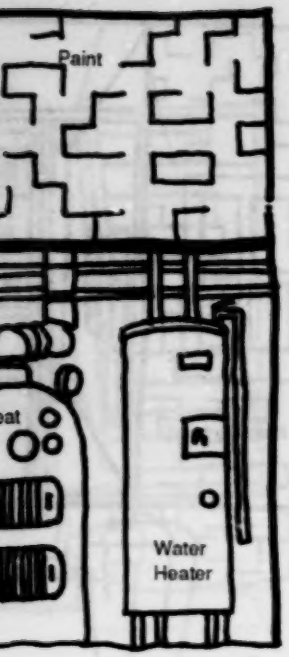
Foundation
A foundation in good condition that has no serious leaks.

Water Supply
A plumbing system that is served by an approvable public or private water supply system. Ask the manager or owner.

Sewage
A plumbing system that is connected to an approvable public or private sewage disposal system. Ask the manager or owner.

Chimneys
No serious leaning or defects (such as big cracks or *many* missing bricks) in any chimneys.

Note: You may not be able to check these items yourself, but the PHA Inspector will check them for you when the unit is inspected.



Paint
No cracking, peeling, or chipping paint if you have children under the age of seven and the house or apartment was built before 1978.

- This includes exterior walls, stairs, decks, porches, railings, windows, and doors.

Cooling
Some windows that open, or some working ventilation or cooling equipment that can provide air circulation during warm months.

Plumbing
Pipes that are in good condition, with no leaks and no serious rust that causes the water to be discolored.

Water Heater
A water heater located, equipped, and installed in a safe manner. Ask the manager or owner.

Heat
Enough heating equipment so that the unit can be made comfortably warm during cold months.

- *Not* acceptable are space heaters (or room heaters) that burn oil or gas and are not vented to a chimney. Space heaters that are vented may be acceptable if they can provide enough heat.

You Should Also Think About:

- How well maintained the exterior of the house or apartment is.
- The type of heating equipment.
  — Will it be able to supply enough heat for you in the winter, to *all* rooms used for living?
- The amount and type of weatherization and its affect on utility costs.
  — Is there insulation?
  — Are there storm windows?
  — Is there weatherstripping around the windows and doors?
- Air circulation or type of cooling equipment (if any).
  — Will the unit be cool enough for you in the summer?

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6. Health and Safety

The Building and Site Must Have:

Fire Exits
The building must provide an alternate means of exit in case of fire (such as fire stairs or exit through windows, with the use of a ladder if windows are above the second floor).

Elevators
Make sure the elevators are safe and work properly.

Entrance
An entrance from the outside or from a public hall, so that it is not necessary to go through anyone else's private apartment to get into the unit.

Neighborhood
No dangerous places, spaces, or things in the neighborhood such as:

- Nearby buildings that are falling down
- Unprotected cliffs or quarries
- Fire hazards
- Evidence of flooding

Garbage
No large piles of trash and garbage inside or outside the unit, or in common areas such as hallways. There must be a space to store garbage (until pickup) that is covered tightly so that rats and other animals cannot get into it. Trash should be picked up regularly.

Note: You may not be able to check all the items listed here yourself, but the PHA Inspector will check them for you when the unit is inspected.

Lights
Lights that work in all common hallways and interior stairs.

Stairs
Interior stairs with railings, and common hallways that are safe and in good condition.

Pollution
No serious air pollution, such as exhaust fumes or sewer gas.

Rodents and Vermin
No sign of rats or large numbers of mice or vermin (like roaches).

For Manufactured Homes: Tie Downs
Manufactured homes must be placed on the site in a stable manner and be free from hazards such as sliding or wind damage.

For Manufactured Homes: Smoke Detectors
At least one smoke detector in every manufactured home.

You Should Also Think About:

- **The type of fire exit.**
  —Is it suitable for your family?
- **How safe the house or apartment is for your family.**
- **The presence of screens and storm windows.**
- **Services in the neighborhood.**
  —Are there stores nearby?
  —Are there schools nearby?
  —Are there hospitals nearby?
  —Is there transportation nearby?

Now that you have finished this booklet, you know that for a house or apartment to be a good place to live, it must meet two kinds of housing quality standards:

- Things it must have in order to be approved for the Section 8 Certificate Program and the Housing Voucher Program.
- Additional things that you should think about for the special needs of your family.

You know that these standards apply in six areas of a house or apartment.

1. Living Room
2. Kitchen
3. Bathroom
4. Other Rooms
5. Building Exterior, Plumbing, and Heating
6. Health and Safety

You know that when a house or apartment meets the housing quality standards, it will be a safe, healthy, and comfortable home for your family. It will be a good place to live.

After you find a good place to live, you can begin the *Request for Lease Approval* process. When both you and the owner have signed the *Request for Lease Approval* and the PHA has received it, an official inspection will take place. The PHA will inform both you and the owner of the inspection results.

If the house or apartment passes, a lease can be signed. There may still be some items that you or the PHA would like improved. If so, you and your PHA may be able to bargain for the improvements when you sign the lease. If the owner is not willing to do the work, perhaps you can get him or her to pay for the materials and do it yourself.

If the house or apartment fails, you and/or your PHA may try to convince the owner to make the repairs so it will pass. The likelihood of the owner making the repairs may depend on how serious or costly they are.

If it fails, all repairs must be made, and the house or apartment must be reinspected, *before* any lease is signed. If the owner cannot or will not repair the house or apartment, even if the repairs are minor, you must look for another home. Make sure you understand *why* the house or apartment failed, so that you will be more successful in your next search.

Responsibilities of the Public Housing Agency:

- Ensure that all units in the Section 8 Certificate Program and the Housing Voucher Program meet the housing quality standards.
- Inspect unit in response to *Request for Lease Approval.* Inform potential tenant and owner of results and necessary actions.
- Encourage tenants and owners to maintain units up to standards.
- Make inspection in response to tenant or owner complaint or request. Inform tenant or owner of necessary actions and time period for compliance.
- Make annual inspection of the unit to ensure that it still meets the housing quality standards. Inform the tenant and owner of the results, necessary actions, and time period for compliance.

Responsibilities of the tenant:

- Live up to the terms of your lease.
- Do your part to keep the unit safe and sanitary.
- Cooperate with the owner by informing him or her of any necessary repairs.
- Cooperate with the PHA for initial, annual, and complaint inspections.

Responsibilities of the owner:

- Comply with the terms of the lease.
- Generally maintain the unit and keep it up to the housing quality standards outlined in this booklet.
- Cooperate with the tenant by responding promptly to requests for needed repairs.
- Cooperate with the PHA on initial, annual, and complaint inspections, including making necessary repairs.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20410

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